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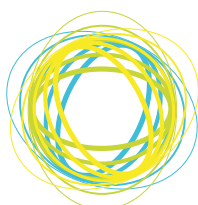
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FINNISH RESEARCH, HIGHER EDUCATION AND INNOVATION COOPERATION WITH LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN: ROADBLOCKS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE ACTION



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This policy brief on Finnish science, higher education and innovation cooperation with Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) region aims to:

- Assess the Finnish policy and funding landscape concerning cooperation with the LAC region,
- Identify the barriers and opportunities related to cooperation with the LAC region from the perspective of the Finnish academic community and highlight themes of collaboration deemed of special importance, and
- Provide recommendations for the strengthening of Finnish cooperation with the LAC region.

While education, research, technology and innovation have been mentioned as potential areas in which mutually beneficial cooperation between Finland and the LAC region has special growth potential, collaboration efforts have often been subject to a lack of both strategy and funding. In recent years, the policy focus has shifted strongly to trade relations, including education export, and the overall premise and funding for international research, higher education and innovation collaboration have substantially deteriorated. The main challenges for Finnish higher education and research institutions to operationalize and pursue long-term cooperation with partners from LAC are lack of policy continuity, coherence and lack of resources, as well as weak articulation and communication between activities in different sectors and institutions. The main recommendation of this policy brief is to develop a more holistic strategy concerning LAC cooperation, with coherent support mechanisms to enable the translation of existing plans and agreements into concrete action. The policy brief is based on a longer report by the same authors to be published in late 2018.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been increasing political discussion on the importance of the Latin American and Caribbean region in Finland. Besides Finnish institutions' existing cooperative ties in science, higher education and innovation with the LAC region in multiple fields, interest in cooperation on both sides is on the increase. There have been frequent high-level visits and delegations between Finland and the countries in the region, as well as a number of agreements signed, and reports written focusing on different aspects of collaboration with Latin America. Figure 1 illustrates Finnish representation and research or capacity building projects in LAC. However, despite previous suggestions of necessary measures that Finland should take in order to enhance and update cooperation to better correspond to the significance of the region on a global scale, practical implementation and follow-up have been inconsistent due to substantial changes in Finnish policies and funding opportunities.

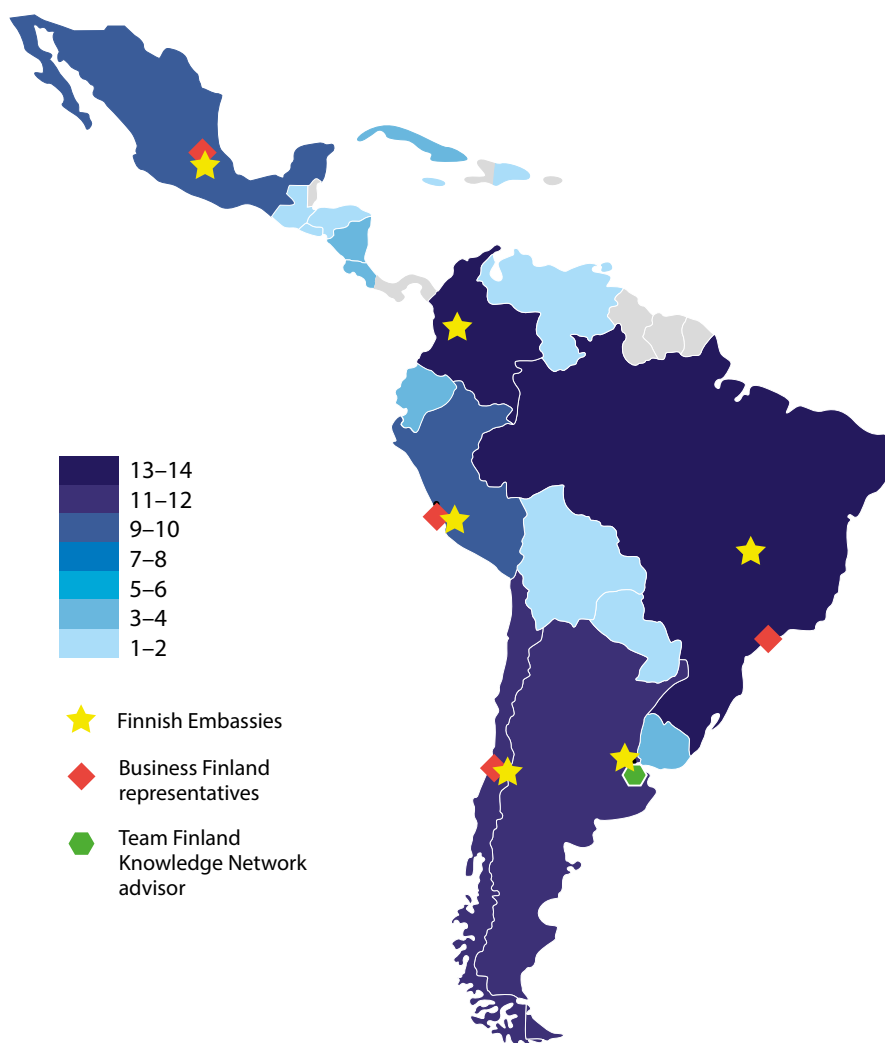


Figure 1. Finnish institutions' research or capacity building cooperation, Finnish embassies and Team Finland representatives in LAC

Finnish institutions' research or capacity building cooperation is indicated on the map in blue. Colour intensity correlates to how many times the country was mentioned by members of the Finnish academic community in the data gathered for the brief. The illustration is by no means exhaustive, but aims to give an idea of the most prominent cooperation countries.

On the positive side, a considerable amount of experience and knowledge have been gathered through Finnish involvement in the European Union and Community of Latin American and the Caribbean States (EU-CELAC) science, technology and innovation (STI) policy dialogues, related bi-regional projects and funding agency cooperation, as well as through the various activities implemented by the FinCEAL initiative (Developing Finnish Science, Technology and Innovation Cooperation with Europe, Africa, Asia and the LAC regions), funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture from 2013 to 2018.

This policy brief synthesizes the recent developments, opportunities and challenges related to LAC cooperation in the context of the Finnish STI landscape, especially from the perspective of the academic community, in order to provide concrete recommendations for the policy makers and funding agencies.

APPROACH

The policy brief is based on a longer report by the same authors, to be published in late 2018. The data for the report was gathered between April 2017 and August 2018, and consisted of existing policy documents and semi-structured interviews with nine representatives of Finnish ministries and funding agencies, as well as an online questionnaire directed to the Finnish academic community. Through the questionnaire, 32 anonymous responses were obtained from experts representing 13 different higher education and research institutions and various scientific fields. In addition, eleven focus group interviews with academics and representatives of public organizations conducted as part of the FinCEAL Feasibility Study were used as supplementary data. Findings from the data have been summarized in *Table 1. SWOT Analysis of the research, higher education and innovation cooperation between Finland and the LAC region* and key takeaways will be highlighted in *Conclusions*.

Assessing collaboration interests and needs from the perspective of stakeholders in the LAC region was considered outside the scope of this report and policy brief, although it would certainly merit more attention in the future. The preparatory work for the report and policy brief was carried out in the framework of the FinCEAL Plus Continuation project, funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture, as well as the project “Latin America, Caribbean and European Union Network on Research and Innovation” (ALCUE NET), funded under European Union grant agreement No 311953.

Table 1. SWOT analysis of the research, higher education and innovation cooperation between Finland and the LAC region

STRENGTHS

Finland's generally positive country image in the LAC region as a neutral country that offers reliable solutions

Increased mutual interest in cooperation in various fields

Existing institutional contacts and policy (MoUs, agreements, political dialogue, involvement with EU-CELAC, JIRI, high-level official visits)

AKA's previous bilateral cooperation with Chile and Brazil, and involvement in ERA-Net LAC and the EU-CELAC Funding Agencies interest group have enabled research cooperation in fields of high priority

Visibility gained for Finnish expertise through involvement in EU-funded and bilateral projects and events in the LAC region

Experience gained in implementing EU-CELAC (EU-funded) and EU-Brazil (jointly-funded) projects in the region in various fields

Networks, cultural knowledge and language skills developed through previous higher education cooperation (student and staff exchanges, HEI-ICI and ICI projects and traineeships in the region)

Researcher mobility, networks and enhanced visibility created through the FinCEAL Initiative

WEAKNESSES

Lack of knowledge and visibility of the LAC region and cooperation opportunities within Finland

Lack of prioritization of LAC for targeted cooperation, although there is recognition of its global relevance for scientific development

Lack of a national vision for cooperation with LAC, which affects funding, staffing and sustainability of cooperation

Overreliance on EU funding and lack of strategy in the Finnish agenda

Cooperation with LAC has been fairly thin and arbitrary in nature, mostly based on personal contacts rather than strategic institutional efforts

Weak communication about already existing cooperation and opportunities within and across Finnish organizations (higher education institutions (HEIs), research organizations, ministries, funding agencies)

Lack of understanding of LAC innovation policies in Finnish institutions

Lack of cultural understanding among those unexperienced with LAC cooperation, which affects partnership building and streamlining of organizational processes

OPPORTUNITIES

Team Finland Knowledge Network and increased cooperation between EDUFI and Business Finland in the region may lead to more systematic knowledge creation about opportunities in LAC

The Forum for Internationalization of Finnish Research and Higher Education provides a platform for strategic decisions regarding internationalization of Finland globally, and potentially also with LAC in particular

More cooperation between Academy of Finland and Business Finland for funding research, innovation and business

More funding from international sources: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, World Bank, development banks (e.g. Inter-American Development Bank, Brazilian Development Bank, Development Bank of Latin America), international foundations

Benchmarking successful solutions implemented by other countries, especially Nordic, and strengthening cooperation with them

Improving Finns' Spanish and Portuguese language skills and understanding of the cultural contexts

LAC region as a priority for education export, interest and need from the LAC side towards cooperation in all levels of education

Incorporating research-based critical views better into the discussion on and planning of future education export endeavours

Complementarity: LAC has the human resources and motivation and Finland the infrastructure, and both partners have specific expertise

LAC diaspora: role as "ambassadors" of Finland in LAC and of LAC in Finland

THREATS

Lack of knowledge and visibility of Finland and cooperation opportunities within the LAC region

Finland lagging behind Nordic countries, in research, education, innovation and business cooperation with LAC – loss of competitive advantage

Low level of bilateral cooperation leads to low Finnish visibility and involvement in LAC countries' national funding schemes and scholarship programmes

Lack of a national scholarship program for international students, potential candidates are lost to other countries, missing opportunities for internationalizing "at home"

Resources are also limited in the EU programmes, and country limitations make cooperation with more economically advanced countries (Brazil, Mexico) more difficult

Know-how related to EU funding mechanisms is relatively low in LAC countries (there are exceptions). They tend to prefer bilateral mechanisms for simplicity, thus mismatching with Finnish preference of multilateral funding schemes

Risk of over-emphasis on education export and technology enthusiasm overriding other potential areas of cooperation

Narrow-minded notion of what education and educational cooperation are for: not for profit but for society as a whole

Political changes in the LAC region and to some extent in Finland make cooperation vulnerable to changes in funding and personnel

CONCLUSIONS

OPPORTUNITIES

Untapped collaboration opportunities are plentiful, as are potential areas and fields of collaboration. Finnish organizations have contacts, and there are many established frameworks in LAC upon which to build. Besides areas in which cooperation has long traditions such as forestry, biodiversity, and social sciences and humanities research, there are several new and interesting themes that would merit more attention.



Figure 2. Potential topics for R&I cooperation between Finland and LAC countries

Themes and fields of most collaboration potential indicated by members of the Finnish academic community. The size of the word correlates with the number of times it was mentioned by the respondents.

Issues related to environmental and social sustainability are high on the agenda and would benefit from closer cooperation. ICT, digitalization, the Internet of Things and big data are also areas worth highlighting. A prominent feature of researchers' answers was the emphasis they placed on the complementary nature of knowledge and skills on both sides and on the need to find areas and collaboration schemes of truly mutual interest and benefit. When it comes to existing and recent types of cooperation, the picture is diverse, including research visits, joint publications, research projects, capacity building activities, joint events, and student, teacher and staff exchanges as well as contract work. Evidently, these different forms of cooperation build on and support each other, which is why upholding a varied cooperation landscape is especially valuable.

CHALLENGE 1: NEED FOR CONTINUITY AND COHERENCE BETWEEN NATIONAL POLICIES CONCERNING LAC COOPERATION

The national STI policy and funding landscape continues to be quite fragmented. Since the Government change in 2015, the overarching trend in Finnish relations with LAC is an increasing emphasis on advancing Finnish business interests. Finland's Latin America and Caribbean Action Plan (Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2013) presented overall aims for developing cooperation between Finland and the LAC region, but implementation of the Plan and follow-up is not mentioned, and the Plan has not been updated since its publication.

Following the global trend of seeing education as a marketable product, Finland's educational policy has also been re-oriented in the past decade. Recently, Latin America has been identified as one of the priority regions in the national education export growth program and tuition fees for non-EU/EEEA students training in Finland have been adopted. While different STI stakeholders agree that education export offers many opportunities, views among the academic community are divided. Many researchers have expressed critical views and concerns about the current policies and education export activities overshadowing other types of higher education and research collaboration.

Finnish STI actors have a variety of contacts and agreements with Latin American institutions, but cooperation is often not operationalized. Evidently, this then results in fewer funding opportunities for the academic community as well as fewer opportunities for Finnish engagement in the LAC region in general. Furthermore, it seems evident that continuity of policies concerning the LAC region beyond one Government term is questionable, as earlier policy recommendations or action plans are not consistently followed up. This is particularly problematic considering the fact that long-term orientation is considered one of the most important aspects of building collaboration with LAC partners by both public authorities and the academic community.

RECOMMENDATION: Design and implement a more systematic and holistic strategy to guide cooperation with the LAC region through a multi-stakeholder discussion that also involves the research community. The strategy should include concrete follow-up measures and timeline. The emphasis on education export should not override other potential areas of cooperation.

More emphasis should also be placed on the practical implementation of already existing plans, agreements and MoUs, which requires dedicated human resources at the institutional level.

CHALLENGE 2: NEED FOR FUNDING AND HUMAN RESOURCES

As a result of reprioritizing and budget cuts, national and bilateral funding for LAC cooperation in research and capacity building for higher education has decreased rather than increased in recent years. Due to the cuts in the basic funding of HEIs and research institutes, they are often not able to offer the necessary support for researchers' internationalization efforts, let alone with countries not prioritized politically, as is the case for the LAC region. A prerequisite for academic partnerships is the ability for scientists and experts from both sides to meet each other, which does not happen automatically considering the large geographical distance and stronger cooperation traditions with Europe and some other regions.

The winding down of bilateral cooperation at the funding agency level can be considered worrisome, especially in the case of a major global player such as Brazil. EU and other international funding sources are an important means to support cooperation, and should be utilized as much as possible, but it's important to notice that many major Latin American research funding agencies favour bilateral funding schemes. If Finland chooses to engage with the region only multilaterally, it means losing competitive advantage to other European and Nordic countries. At the same time, preconditions for higher education

cooperation with LAC have also deteriorated considerably, since LAC is no longer a priority in the HEI-ICI or ICI programmes, despite continued demand for capacity building activities in LAC. Furthermore, it is highly likely that the adoption of tuition fees will negatively affect the number of incoming degree students from the region, especially since there is no national scholarship system in place.

Besides the lack of funding, both Finnish authorities and academics report the lack of human resources as a major obstacle. The shortage of staff leads to tasks piling up and time pressure, while short-term contracts and fixed-term personnel leaving the organization lead to constant attrition and loss of know-how at the institutional level and often a general lack of continuity for cooperation activities and established partnerships. Neither is there enough time for strategic planning or maintaining regular institutional contacts with international partners, including LAC counterparts. Obviously, this is a structural problem with much wider implications than just international cooperation.

RECOMMENDATIONS: It is important to utilize EU and other international funding mechanisms more systematically, and to continue involvement in EU-CELAC funding agencies' cooperation. At the same time, the possibilities for maintaining bilateral cooperation with at least the most important partner countries in LAC should be reassessed. New, innovative ways of funding novel, promising topics should be developed, possibly as co-funding between the Academy of Finland and Business Finland and LAC counterparts.

CHALLENGE 3: NEED FOR IMPROVED INFORMATION SHARING, VISIBILITY AND PARTNERSHIP BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES

Finnish knowledge and understanding of the LAC region and its development is in general often outdated, especially when it comes to public discussion. There are still widespread misconceptions and stereotypical ideas about the LAC region in Finland that lead to generalizations that do not do justice to the vast diversity of economic and social realities present across the region. Experts of LAC background living in Finland as well as researchers with both theoretical and practical understanding of the region could have a stronger role in the national discussion in dispelling outdated myths and highlighting prominent and topical issues and processes in the region.

The establishment of the Forum for Internationalization of Higher Education and Research, the Team Finland Knowledge Network, and a stronger Team Finland representation in the LAC region are positive steps towards addressing the challenges related to national coordination and information sharing, especially if sufficient emphasis is placed on communication between and within institutions.

While many researchers have existing partnerships in the region, it requires effort and a stronger involvement in potential networks and events in the region to find the best partners and build beneficial collaboration schemes. An important means for gaining new information and access to LAC networks is through the different EU platforms such as the Joint Initiative for Research and Innovation (JIRI), EU-CELAC Platform, as well as bi-regional Horizon2020 and Erasmus+ projects, which also provide visibility. The FinCEAL grant scheme has also considerably enhanced researcher mobility between Finland and LAC countries in the past five years, and there is a need for similar targeted support in the coming years.

RECOMMENDATIONS: It is important to continue consistent and active participation in the existing bi-regional platforms and mechanisms. In general, more efforts should be made to improve knowledge sharing practices between the academic community and decision makers, and to strengthen communications between and within Finnish institutions.

There is also a need to continue supporting researcher mobility and the organization of joint thematic events and delegations in the coming years, which besides offering more visibility to Finnish expertise, prepares the ground for long-term projects and other forms of collaboration.

IMPLICATIONS

Without adequate political and financial support, research, higher education and innovation cooperation with LAC countries is at the risk of becoming increasingly inconsistent and overly dependent on the availability of EU funds. This may also mean that existing partnerships that took time and resources to build, will wither, and that the windfall benefits of long-term partnerships will be lost. Furthermore, this results in Finland having an increasingly disadvantaged position in comparison to competitors such as the other Nordic countries. Proper implementation of the new internationalization strategy for higher education and research requires upholding and developing different forms of cooperation, which build on and support each other. Therefore, it is important that education export does not override other potential areas of cooperation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Designing and implementing a more **systematic and holistic strategy** or updating the Latin America and Caribbean Action Plan to guide cooperation with the LAC region, including follow-up measures and timeline
 - Strengthening the **multi-stakeholder discussion** between different STI actors to formulate a national vision with regard to LAC cooperation – this could be achieved by establishing **a region-specific working group at the Forum for Internationalization** or similar platform
 - **Incorporating the research community** (including international researchers) better into the policy dialogues, and incorporating research-based critical views better into the discussion on, and planning of, future STI cooperation and education export endeavours
 - Deploying strategies by improving communication with Finnish embassies, Team Finland Knowledge Network and other Finnish representation in the region
- Systematically assessing the collaboration (including research) interests and needs of stakeholders in the LAC region in chosen priority countries
 - Strategically selecting **themes, topics and sectors that are important for LAC and in which Finland has competences**, and building projects on mutual interest and benefit
- Utilizing the momentum of enhanced Finnish presence in LAC
 - Enhancing communication between Finnish ministries, funding agencies, Finnish embassies, Team Finland Knowledge Network and other Finnish representation in the region and the Finnish academic community
- Continuing active involvement in **EU-level policy making** through the Strategic Forum for International Cooperation in Research (SFIC) and JIRI, seeking alliances with other member states to establish a stronger say in EU politics towards the region
- Benchmarking **the experiences of other Nordic countries** and assessing the potential for increasing joint activities towards LAC
- Developing **more flexible national funding instruments** and more collaboration between Finnish funders, based on best/successful practices, benchmarked if needed
- Reconsidering the possibility of **bilateral collaboration with LAC research and innovation funders** – especially those identified as the most important partners, such as Brazil and Chile
- Providing financial **support for researcher mobility, research visits and joint thematic events and proposal preparation** through FinCEAL or a similar instrument is still much needed
- Promoting a **more systematic utilization of EU, Nordic, LAC and other international funding** sources through increased visibility and communication efforts

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